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Deal Delivers Final State of the State Address; Releases Budget Recommendations

Gov. Nathan Deal delivered his eighth and final [State of the State address](#) on Jan. 11 to a joint session of the General Assembly. Deal discussed what his administration and the state of Georgia have achieved since his election in 2011. Highlights from his speech include:

- Recognizing First Lady Sandra Deal’s work as the “standard bearer” for childhood literacy;
- Highlighting improvements to the Technical College System of Georgia, including the addition of five new categories for HOPE Career Grants that cover 100 percent of tuition for technical school students who enroll in one of Georgia’s strategic industry, high-demand fields; and
- Announcing his budget proposal to add \$22.9 million for implementing [recommendations](#) of the Commission on Children’s Mental Health, which Deal created in June 2017.

Governor’s Floor Leaders

Deal announced his 2018 House and Senate floor leaders last week. Rep. Chuck Efstrotation (Dist. 104), Rep. Trey Rhodes (Dist. 120), and Rep. Terry Rogers (Dist. 10) will continue as House floor leaders. Senator-elect Brian Strickland (Dist. 17) will join Sen. P.K. Martin (Dist. 9) and Sen. Larry Walker III (Dist. 20) to carry the governor’s bills in the Senate.

Adoption Reform

One of the most closely watched bills is [HB 159](#) (Rep. Bert Reeves, 34th), a comprehensive revision of Georgia’s adoption code that lowers the age one can access the adoption reunion registry from 21 to 18,

eases foreign adoption procedures, and permits nonresidents to grant adoption of his or her child. The bill passed the House in 2017 but was amended in the Senate to include language allowing private agencies receiving state funds to refuse to place children with same-sex parents.

There was a last-minute attempt to pass the bill on Sine Die in 2017, when the House passed **SB 130** (Sen. Blake Tillery, 19th), which included language from HB 159. The Senate voted to recommit SB 130 to the Senate Judiciary Committee, ending the bill's chance of passing during the 2017 session.

House Speaker David Ralston and Deal have urged the General Assembly to pass a version of HB 159 without the language added in the Senate, and Ralston said that passing adoption reform legislation is one of the House's top priorities for the 2018 session.

The Senate Judiciary Committee passed a [substitute version of HB 159](#) last Thursday, and—while the bill does not include language allowing private agencies to prohibit same-sex couples from adopting—it includes language from HB 359 (Rep. Barry Fleming, 121st), which Deal [vetoed](#) last year. That language allows a parent to delegate caregiving authority for one year or less to an individual who resides in Georgia and is a relative or fictive kin by executing a power of attorney.

Budget

Deal's recommendation for Georgia Family Connection's appropriation remains unchanged from last year's final budget. Highlights from Deal's other [Amended FY18](#) and [FY19](#) budget recommendations include:

Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities (DBHDD)—Amended FY18
\$128,292 in existing funds for telehealth services and three positions for behavioral health services for children under 21 who are diagnosed autistic (total funds: \$157,584)

DBHDD—FY19

The Commission on Children's Mental Health recommends all of these items:

- \$790,801 to prevent child and adolescent opioid abuse
- \$5.9 million for crisis services for children under 21 who are diagnosed autistic
- \$10.3 million for child and adolescent mental health crisis services
- \$4.29 million for the Georgia Apex Program for school-based mental health for an additional 13 grants
- \$150,000 in one-time funds and \$232,500 for child and adolescent mental health telemedicine services
- \$1.09 million for child and adolescent suicide prevention
- \$610,545 for wrap-around services training
- \$3.06 million for supported employment and education assistance for an additional 500 young adults

Department of Community Health (DCH)—Amended FY18

\$12,675 in existing funds for one program coordinator position for children under 21 who are diagnosed autistic (total funds: \$25,350)

DCH—FY19

- \$847,962 to develop capacity for behavioral health services for children under 21 who are diagnosed autistic
- \$67,000 in existing funds for Right from the Start Medicaid caseworker retention (total funds: \$268,000)
- \$50,700 in existing funds for continuation funding for program coordinator position for children under 21 who are diagnosed autistic (total funds: \$101,400)
- Increase funding within the State Health Benefit Plan to reflect enrollment growth to match Medicaid age requirement through age 21 for treatment of autism spectrum disorders (total funds: \$2.2 million)

Department of Early Care and Learning—FY19

\$2,438,820 in additional lottery funds for the pre-K program

Department of Education (DOE)—Amended FY18

\$15 million to purchase 194 new school buses statewide

DOE—FY19

Reduce funding for school nurses by \$580,542

Department of Human Services (DHS)—Amended FY18

\$15.1 million for growth in Out-of-Home Care utilization (total funds: \$17,362,915)

DHS—FY19

- \$2.25 million for care coordinator positions to improve outcomes for children in foster care as recommended by the Commission on Children’s Mental Health (total funds: \$2,464,928)
- \$7.46 million and \$2.67 million for a \$2.50 per-day increase for relative foster parents and child placement agency foster parents, respectively
- \$2.46 million to increase child caring institution per diem rates by 2.5 percent (total funds: \$2,789,593)

Department of Juvenile Justice—FY19

- \$531,810 to increase child caring institution per diem rates by 2.5 percent
- \$3.5 million for security, management, education, and medical services at the 56-bed Cadwell Regional Youth Detention Center under construction in Laurens County
- \$650,000 for the new 48-bed Regional Youth Detention Center in Wilkes County

Department of Public Health (DPH)—Amended FY18

\$159,105 in existing funds for telehealth infrastructure and for one program-support coordinator position to provide behavioral health services to children under 21 who are diagnosed autistic (total funds: \$171,780)

DPH—FY19

- \$50,700 in existing funds for continuation funding for program support coordinator position for children under 21 who are diagnosed autistic (total funds: \$101,400)
- \$100,000 to develop capacity for children under 21 who are diagnosed autistic

Georgia Student Finance Commission—Amended FY18

\$10.74 million in additional funds to meet the projected need for dual-enrollment students (The program, which allows students to pursue postsecondary study at approved public and private institutions while receiving dual high-school and college credit, has changed names from Move on When Ready.)

Georgia Student Finance Commission—FY19

- \$34,379,357 in increased funds to meet the projected need for dual-enrollment students
- Increase HOPE Scholarship awards by 3 percent

Juvenile Courts—FY19

- \$122,600 for one Juvenile Detention Alternative Initiative statewide coordinator position
- \$200,000 for a Children in Need of Services statewide coordinator position

Schedule

Legislators passed an [adjournment resolution](#) setting the calendar for the first 11 legislative days. They were in session four days last week, and then adjourned until Thursday, Jan. 18, which will be the fifth legislative day.

The House and Senate appropriations committees will hold joint hearings on Tuesday and Wednesday this week.